

# Letter from Taizé

Bimonthly 3.50 FF

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February - March 1995

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Translated into 60 languages (including 21 Asian languages and 9 African languages), this letter was written by Brother Roger for the European meeting of young adults which brought to PARIS for five days, from 28 December 1994 to 1 January 1995, more than 100,000 participants from all the countries of Eastern and Western Europe, as well as young people from 54 countries on other continents. The meeting in PARIS is the seventeenth annual European meeting. It is a stage in the "pilgrimage of trust on earth" animated by Taizé. This letter will be reflected on during the INTERCONTINENTAL MEETINGS OF YOUNG ADULTS that will be held in Taizé each week throughout 1995.

## The Wonder of a Love

Letter 1995

John 11,35-36.

"There is no violence in God. God sent Christ not to accuse us, but to call us to himself, not to judge us, but because he loves us" (Letter to Diognetus, second century after Christ). There are physical forms of violence on earth, including war, torture, murder... There are other forms of violence too, those that are concealed in the ploys of mistrust and of cunning, in suspicion, humiliation, an unkept promise...

An Orthodox theologian from Bucharest who died in 1993, Father Staniloe, and who had been in prison for his beliefs, wrote words so essential that we would like to know them by heart: "I looked for God in the human beings of my village, then in books and in ideas. But that brought me neither peace nor love. One day, while reading the Church Fathers, I discovered that it was possible to encounter God through prayer. I gradually realized that God was close to me, that he loved me, and that filled by his love, my heart opened to others. I realized that love was a communion, with God and with others. And without that communion, everything is only sadness and desolation."

In the depths of our being, a little part of ourselves remains solid, unshakeable as rock.

### A meeting for the young adults of Southern Africa

will be held 5 - 7 May, in Johannesburg, South Africa, at the invitation of the various Churches in the region. After this meeting, Brother Roger will go to Tanzania, a country where so many children have lost their parents because of AIDS.

**B**y night, we will go to the spring. Deep within us there sparkles living water where we can quench our thirsts.

By night and by day, as we move forward from beginning to new beginning, a whole life is built up.

Could the human soul be that, too: the secret heartbeat of a happiness almost beyond words?

**I**n the presence of physical violence or moral torture a question plagues us: if God is love, where does evil come from?

No one can explain the why of evil. In the Gospel, Christ enters into solidarity with the incomprehensible suffering of the innocent; he weeps at the death of someone he loves.<sup>1</sup>

Did not Christ come to earth so that every human being might know that he or she is loved?<sup>2</sup>

When we can sense hardly anything of God's presence, what good is agonizing over it?

It is enough to have the desire to welcome God's love for a flame to be kindled, little by little, in the secret recesses of our being. "Filled by his love, the heart opens to others."<sup>3</sup>

Animated by the Holy Spirit, this flame of love can be quite faint. And yet it keeps burning.

And the Holy Spirit stirs us up and is at work within us, reorienting the depths of our being,<sup>4</sup> preparing us to dare to live lives of forgiveness and reconciliation.

...And the heart awakens to the wonder of a love.

To let ourselves be refreshed by living water welling up in us, it is good to go off for a few days in silence and peace.

In ancient times Elijah, the believer, set out in search of a place to listen to God. And there he made this discovery: God's voice finds a way of making itself understood in a breath of silence.<sup>5</sup>

God is familiar with our longings. He perceives better than we do ourselves our most basic intentions and what lies deep within us. What we have trouble grasping in prayer, God has already understood.

When we pray and nothing seems to happen, does our prayer remain unanswered? No. The fire of a love penetrates even the arid regions, even the contradictions of our being.

In quiet trust in God, all prayer finds some kind of fulfillment. Perhaps it is different than we expected... Does not God answer us with a view to a greater love?<sup>6</sup>

The beauty of prayer with others is an incomparable support. Through simple words and symbols, it communicates a discreet and silent joy.

Who will find ways of preparing and opening children and young people to the mystery of trust in Christ?<sup>7</sup> Already glimpsed in a person's early years, an intuition of faith develops in their heart of hearts. Even if it is forgotten, it can reappear throughout their life.<sup>8</sup>

But why are some people seized by the wonder of a love and know that they are loved, and even filled to overflowing? Why do others have the impression that they are neglected, loved little for what they are?<sup>9</sup>

Every human being yearns to be loved as well as to love. It is not for nothing that the Gospel alerts us about not becoming locked up in isolation.

When we are listened to, obstacles fall away that were created by frustrations of the heart, wounds from a recent or distant past. Being listened to is the beginning of a healing of the soul.<sup>10</sup>

And the breath of a trust arises... And a gateway to freedom begins to open up.

Though there are fragilities in human beings, there is also a fathomless thirst for freedom.

Like the most beautiful of coins, freedom can have an other side. What kind of freedom would it be if, used in a self-centred way, it harmed the freedom of others? Freedom is intimately linked to forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>11</sup>

Here too Christ invites us to a humble repentance. And what

5 I Kings 19,3-13.

6 Happy those who live in trust of heart; they will see God! How will they see him? Like Mary who, attentive, "kept everything in her heart" (Luke 2,19,51) and saw God with her inward eye. A vision can be given by the Holy Spirit, but it is not the appearance of a person, known or unknown, who stands alongside us. It is an image drawn from within ourselves, clear enough to allow us to "see" a loved or venerated being. It is possible to love Christ so much that we have such a vision, brought into being by the Holy Spirit. But what are visions or ecstasies when compared to an act of love, of forgiveness, of reconciliation?

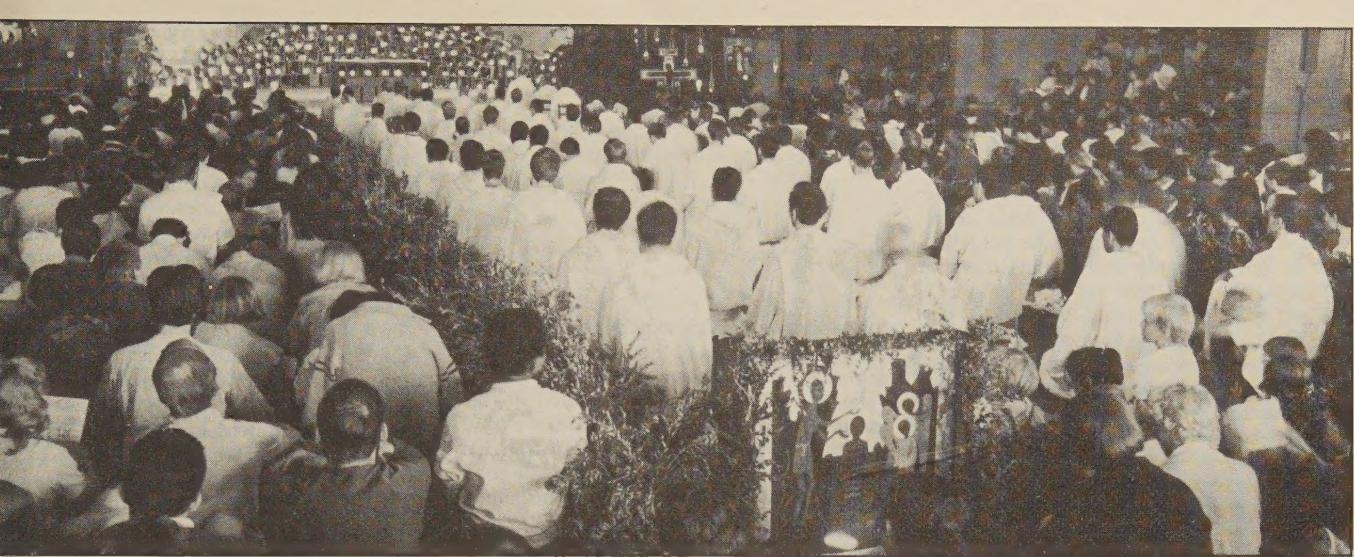
7 Take a child by the hand, go with that child into a church to pray...and he or she can be awakened to the mystery of faith. This is possible at home, too. In the fourth century, Saint John Chrysostom wrote: "The home is a little church." Today, in secularized societies, it is good for our homes to give glimpses of an invisible presence by means of a few symbols of Christ. At home we can set up a corner for prayer, however small, with an icon, a candle... Of course, making one's home a little church, an "ecclesiola," can never mean becoming a closed group and so forgetting the universal dimension of the Church.

8 Faith can reappear in adulthood in people who prayed with members of their family as children. When there is a void in childhood, however, it can happen that this void is filled in whatever way possible, using the elements that happen to be at hand. How could a child have the maturity to sort out all those elements?

9 As a result of different events, a child can experience a feeling of rejection. And in that child, an inner appeal is born not to be abandoned. It happens that children are wounded by tensions in their family, by explanations given by adults in their presence. Understanding a child, or a young person, requires a great deal of discernment. Often the question can arise: Will someone be present to help them pass through a void that affects them in their heart of hearts?

10 Being listened to by someone with experience in reading what lies beneath the contradictions of the human being. To listen, it is not necessary to have a method, but to know how to discern the gifts, the wounds, the thirst for God, in those who come with something to confide. Some elderly persons are able to listen, to understand the young, to unburden them of a load of worry.

11 Even under the guise of loving someone, it is possible to keep them captive in that desert which is emotional blackmail. Even in the name of freedom, it is possible to manipulate another person.



**D**uring the year 1995, In the meetings of young adults held every week in Taizé, hours will be devoted to vital questions and very concrete projects. Among these questions, for example:

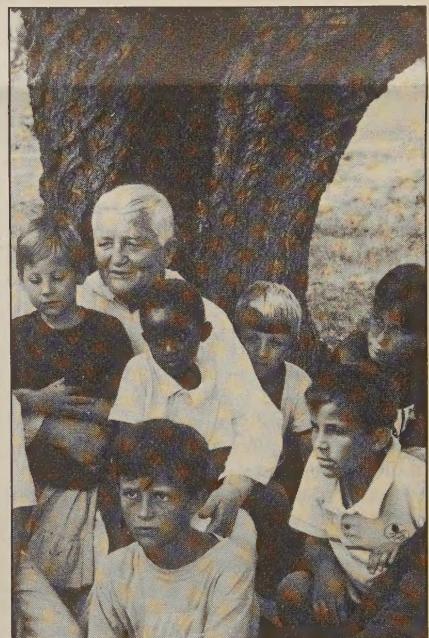
- What gives meaning to life?
- What can each person do in the presence of human suffering?

For more information and to register for the meetings, write to: Meetings, 71250 TAIZÉ-Community, France. Tel (33) 85.50.30.02 or, if urgent, (33) 85.50.30.30. Fax (33) 85.50.30.16.

## Helping Children Around the World

In Tanzania and Uganda, we have begun helping orphans whose parents have died of AIDS. We are going to increase this aid in the coming year. In addition, we will support children of lepers in Ethiopia, children from Bosnia, children in Bangladesh and children in the North East of Brazil.

Children from  
Bosnia and  
Rwanda  
welcomed last  
year in Taizé.



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## POPE JOHN PAUL II

Brother Roger, Prior of Taizé  
Dear Brother,

For the seventeenth consecutive year, your community is inviting young adults, from 28 December 1994 to 1 January 1995, to a European meeting which represents a stage in the "pilgrimage of trust on earth." After many other cities, it will once again be held this year in Paris, after the first meeting there in 1978 and the one in 1988.

The Pope gives thanks to the Lord for the step undertaken by the young people taking part in this gathering. He invites them to draw from prayer, an intimate encounter with the Lord, the strength necessary to undergo a personal conversion and to be active members of the building up of the Europe of the third millennium. By strengthening their faith, which contributes to the unification of the personality, as well as by taking stock of the changes taking place in society, the young will be led to commit themselves more and more to announce the Good News of salvation to their brothers and sisters. If the younger generations are able to follow the Risen Christ, they "will have the joy of making their contribution to his presence in the coming century" (John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, no. 58), so that a new world may arise.

The reconciliation for which each person can receive the grace, if they are able to open their heart to God's forgiveness, will make possible a reconciliation between generations and between peoples, to heal the wounds of history; in this way, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, we will know a Europe of greater solidarity, where each person will truly be loved and welcomed for themselves by their brothers and sisters, because they are infinitely precious in the eyes of God.

By the intercession of Our Lady, the Holy Father invokes upon those taking part in this meeting, on the community which is animating it, as well as on the parishes and families that are welcoming them, the Lord's blessing.

## PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEOS OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Young people of the Church with radiant faces, "rejoice in the Lord always; rejoice!" Coming from the East, the Centre, the West, the North and the South of Europe, you have come together, from all denominations, in order to be mutually enriched and to understand other young adults better, as well as people in general.

Human beings learn not just by reading books, but also by attentively observing that open book which is life. That is why it is important for every young person to try and change their own life and better their environment.

Dear Brother Roger, we congratulate you for having taken the initiative, for many years now, of bringing together young adults from the different countries of Europe. We bless those who are responding to your invitation and are joining you, in Paris, on the threshold of the new year.

These young people will benefit from your own experience; they will also hear your brothers; they will reflect. But above all, they will have the experience of meetings, visits,

## MESSAGES SENT TO TAIZÉ FOR THE EUROPEAN MEETING IN PARIS

## THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, MR BOUTROS-GHALI

Dear Friends from Taizé,

For the seventeenth consecutive year, you are meeting today, together, to celebrate the friendship between young adults of all nationalities and all cultures.

Once again—I am deeply convinced—that gathering to which the Taizé Community invites you will be a great success.

The ecumenical and demanding faith which brings you together constitutes an exemplary illustration of the bonds of solidarity and respect which should unite all the members of the great human family.

Your commitment on behalf of a better world constitutes, for all us political leaders, an encouragement and a support.

By your youth and your enthusiasm, you are a source of life and hope.

Today, your faith in the future must be all the more fervent since Europe is experiencing, once again, the threats of war, fanaticism and exclusion.

It is thus more indispensable than ever for the youth of every country to be mobilized in the service of the great ideals written in the Charter of the United Nations, and to commit themselves to serve peace, development, democracy and human rights.

I want to tell you, today, that I have confidence in you and in your activity. And, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Organization, I like to think that the community of love and tolerance that you form prefigures what the human community of tomorrow could be!

Be assured that all my best wishes accompany the work of Brother Roger and your meeting in Paris.

## THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, DR GEORGE CAREY

My warmest greetings and prayers are with you as you gather in Paris for the 17th Annual European Meeting. As many of you know I have a very high regard for Taizé and its distinguished work for God. My visit in 1992 with 1000 young Anglicans is a vivid and glorious memory. It enlarged and deepened my spiritual life. I was thrilled as the young people I brought with me entered into deeper experiences of God's love for them. Some of them even felt God calling them to offer their lives to him in the service of others.

That is what you are doing now: not only enjoying the marvellous fellowship which Taizé means but entering into God's deep anguish for his broken world, torn apart by sin, selfishness and individualism. My work this year has taken me into the poverty and suffering of Sudan, to see something of the explosion of faith in China and to share some of the hopes emerging with the prospect of peace in Northern Ireland. In all these places Taizé and its work are known and I find it no longer surprising to hear the familiar songs of Taizé being sung thousands of miles away from the pleasant slopes of Burgundy!

I believe that the task you are engaged in is a vital one for the future of Europe and of the Church in Europe. Brother Roger and his brothers have seen their "mustard seed" grow from such tiny beginnings to become a world wide force of great significance. And its roots lie in listening and praying, the two things I know you will spend much time doing over these five days.

May God bless you and may you discover new depths of understanding and unity through your time together.

## A young man from Rwanda, who was in Taizé in 1993, is now in a refugee camp. He writes:

"All my friends have disappeared. They were all killed around me. I don't know where my mother and my sisters are; my little brother and my cousin are in the camp and both are very ill. Only the compassion of the Risen Christ shows me a way out of this tunnel which is the feeling of being condemned to death."

## A young woman from Sarajevo said last summer in Taizé:

"When the war started, I was an engineering and computer-science student in Sarajevo. My family and I lived near the airport. We had to leave that dangerous zone. I lost my home, then the opportunity to study. I began to help people to survive in that impossible situation and I found a meaning for my life in helping others. I have noticed that young people everywhere, from the West or the East, are dissatisfied; some do not really have a zest for life. Lacking everything, in Sarajevo, we discovered that God was close to us and we found a zest for life in helping others."

# MEDITATING ON THE WORD

## MARCH

*These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.*

## JOHANNINE HOURS

### DEUTERONOMY 6,1-9

1 **WED** 2 Co 5.20-6.2 Mt 6.1-6;16-18

We are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were making his appeal through us. And we implore you in the name of Christ: be reconciled to God. Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

2 **THU** Jr 1.4-12 Lk 9.22-25

The Lord said to Jeremiah: Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you and consecrated you.

3 **FRI** Mt 5.43-47 Is 58.5-9

Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

4 **SAT** Lk 5.27-32 Is 58.9-12

Jesus noticed a tax collector called Matthew sitting at the tax office and he said to him, "Follow me." And, leaving everything, Matthew got up and followed him.

5 **SUN** Ps 40 Dt 26.4-10 Lk 4.1-13

I waited, I waited for the Lord, and he heard my cry. He put a fresh song in my mouth: a hymn of praise to our God.

6 **MON** Ezk 18.30b-32 Mt 25.34-40

The Lord says: I take no pleasure in the death of anyone. Turn to me and live!

7 **TUE** Is 55.6-7 Lk 19.1-10

Seek the Lord while he is near. Turn to our God, he pardons freely.

8 **WED** Lk 8.19-21 Is 55.10-11

Jesus said: My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.

9 **THU** Mt 7.7-11 Dt 30.2-3a

Jesus said: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

10 **FRI** Is 44.21-22 Mt 5.23-24

The Lord says: I have dispelled your offenses like a cloud, and your sins like the morning mist. Come back to me, for I have redeemed you.

11 **SAT** Is 1.16-18 Mt 6.19-21

The Lord says: Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

12 **SUN** Lk 9.28b-36 Gr 15.5-12;17-18

Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face changed. Then a cloud enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud saying: This is my Son, the Chosen One; listen to him.

13 **MON** Dt 4.29-31 Mt 9.14-17

You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search for him with all your heart and all your soul.

14 **TUE** Mt 20.20-28 Is 30.15,18

Jesus said: Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant.

15 **WED** Ws 11.23-24 Jn 2.13-25

You are merciful to all, Lord, because you are almighty. You love everything that exists.

16 **THU** Jl 2.12-13 Lk 13.1-9

The Lord says: Come back to me with all your heart. Come back to the Lord your God for he is tender and compassionate, and rich in faithful love.

17 **FRI** Mt 18.19-22 Dt 7.6-9

Jesus said: When two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.

18 **SAT** Jr 15.16 Lk 18.9-14

Jeremiah said: When your words came, Lord, I devoured them: your word was my delight and the joy of my heart.

19 **SUN** Jn 4.1-10 Ex 3.1-8;10-15

St JOSEPH Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: If you only knew what God is offering and who it is who is saying to you, "Give me something to drink", you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.

20 **MON** Jr 29.11-14 Jn 4.10-14

The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

21 **TUE** Jn 4.14-26 Zc 1.3-4

Jesus said: Anyone who drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again. The water I give them will become a spring of water within them, welling up to eternal life.

22 **WED** Mi 7.14-16 Jn 4.27-42

The flock you chose, Lord, is alone in the wilderness. Shepherd your people and lead them to pasture.

23 **THU** Mi 7.18-20 Jn 4.43-54

What God can compare with you, Lord, for pardoning sin and overlooking transgression? You will again have compassion on us, treading our sins underfoot.

Mk 12.28-34 Hos 14.2-5

24 **FRI** Lk 1.26-38 Is 7.10-15

Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. These are the two greatest commandments.

25 **SAT** Lk 1.26-38 Is 7.10-15

The angel said to Mary: Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

Jos 5.10-12

26 **SUN** Coming to his senses, the prodigal son said: I will leave this place and go to my Father and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son." But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

Jr 20.7-9 Jn 9.1-12

27 **MON** Jeremiah said: The word of the Lord has brought insult and derision upon me. And so I said to myself, "I shall not think about him, I shall no longer speak in his name." But there seemed to be a burning fire in my heart, which I could not contain.

Is 65.17-19 Jn 9.13-17

28 **TUE** The Lord says: See, I am going to create new heavens and a new earth. Be filled with rejoicing for ever, for I am creating my people to be gladness.

Is 49.8-10 Jn 9.18-34

29 **WED** The Lord says: My people will not go hungry or thirsty, they will not be scorched by the heat of the desert, for the one who has compassion on them will be with them, guiding them to springs of water.

Jn 9.35-39 Jn 31.31-34

30 **THU** Jesus said to the man born blind: "Do you believe in the Son of man?" "Sir," the man replied, "tell me who he is, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said: "You have seen him; he is speaking to you."

Ps 46 Ws 2.1a;12-20 Jn 7.1-18

31 **FRI** God is our refuge and strength, and an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be in turmoil.

*Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.*

**I**n the ancient world, there were many gods. Every aspect of life had its tutelary deities: there were the gods of the home, the gods of work, of travel, and so on. If the diversity of life was thus clearly manifested, its unity remained more precarious.

In this context, the heart of the religion of the people of the Bible is all the more surprising: faith in one God alone (v.4), a God without peers. This does not imply so much the non-existence of other gods (explicit monotheism, a formal denial of their existence, is a relatively late phenomenon) as the call for a total commitment. In other words, confessing one God is not an abstract proposition but a concrete choice: we are going to follow the Lord and nobody else, "without turning either to the right or the left" (Deut 5,32).

But the God of Israel is not one of the "little deities" of the surrounding world who rebelled against the others and conquered them. On the contrary, this God has the right to ask for a total commitment because his realm encompasses the whole of existence. Since this God is the Source of all that exists, those who give him everything are not mutilated. The diversity of life remains, but it is placed at the service of a deeper unity.

And so this faith reveals, as if by ricochet, the unity of the human being. Henceforth there exists in us the possibility of a yes that commits our entire being. A human being is not a mere collection of disparate elements; faith makes possible, starting from the heart, a slow and patient unification of the personality, in order to love the Lord with all one's heart, with all one's soul and with all one's strength.

- Through what acts, even very humble ones, can we express our wish to love the Lord with our whole being?
- Does my faith help me to find unity in my life especially when I feel pulled in all directions by inner contradictions? How?

# MEDITATING ON THE WORD

## APRIL

*These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.*

**1 SAT** Jesus cried out: Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink!  
*Jn 7.37-39 Ep 4.32-5.2*

**2 SUN** Jesus said to the woman who had been brought before him: "Where are those who were accusing you? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir", she said. "Neither do I condemn you", said Jesus, "Go, and sin no more."  
*Jn 8.1-11 Is 43.16-21*

**3 MON** The Lord says: My servant does not cry out or raise his voice. Faithfully he will present what is just; he will not falter or be discouraged until he has established justice on the earth.  
*Is 42.1-4 Jn 11.1-45*

**4 TUE** The Lord says to his servant: I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and shape you. I will make you a light to the nations.  
*Is 42.5-7 Jn 8.31-36*

**5 WED** The Lord says to his servant: It is not enough for you to be my servant. I shall make you a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach the furthest corners of the earth.  
*Is 49.1-6 Jn 10.31-39*

**6 THU** Jesus said: In truth, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains only a single grain. But if it dies it yields a big harvest.  
*Jn 12.20-26 Is 53.1-5*

**7 FRI** Jesus said: When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to me.  
*Jn 12.27-32 Is 53.11-12*

**8 SAT** The Lord says: I shall make a covenant of peace with my people, and it will be an eternal covenant. I shall set my sanctuary among them for ever.  
*Ez 37.26-28 Jn 12.44-47*

**9 SUN** PALM SUNDAY  
 As Jesus came into Jerusalem, the crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: Blessed is the one who comes as king in the name of the Lord!  
*Lk 19.28-40 Is 50.4-7*

**10 MON** Jesus said to his disciples: Stay alert and pray in order to withstand the trial. The spirit is willing, but human nature is weak.  
*Mt 26.30-46 Mt 26.47-68*

**11 TUE** They led Jesus out to crucify him. They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha where they crucified him.  
*Mk 15.1-32 Mk 14.32-72*

**12 WED** The criminal said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."  
*Lk 23.36-46 Lk 23.1-12*

**13 THU** Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, now loved them to the end.  
*Jn 13.1-15 Lk 22.7-23*

**14 FRI** GOOD FRIDAY  
 On the cross, Jesus said, "It is fulfilled", and bowing his head he gave up his spirit.  
*Jn 19.1-37 Jn 18.28-40*

**15 SAT** Job said: I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will take his stand upon the earth.  
*Jb 19.25-26 Mt 27.62-66*

**16 SUN** EASTER DAY  
 The Risen Christ said to Mary of Magdala: Go and find my brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.  
*Jn 20.1-18 Col 3.1-4*

**17 MON** Having recognized the Risen Christ, the disciples at Emmaus set out that moment and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven who said to them, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."  
*Lk 24.33-49 Ac 2.14;22-28*

**18 TUE** The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid: I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen as he said he would."  
*Mt 28.1-8 Ac 2.36-41*

**19 WED** Peter said to the crippled man, "I have neither silver nor gold, but I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!"  
*Ac 3.1-10 Mt 28.9-20*

**20 THU** The Risen Christ breathed upon his disciples and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.  
*Jn 20.19-23 Ac 3.11-21*

**21 FRI** Christ, the stone the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone.  
*Ac 4.1-12 Jn 21.4-14*

**22 SAT** Lord, you look upon the humble. Though I live surrounded by trouble, you give me life.  
*Ps 138 Ac 4.13-21 Mk 16.1-8*

**23 SUN** Jesus said to Thomas: You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.  
*Jn 20.24-31 Ac 5.12-16*

**24 MON** Jesus said: What is born of the Spirit is spirit. The wind blows where it pleases: you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with those who are born of the Spirit.  
*Jn 3.1-8 Ac 4.32-37*

**25 TUE** ST MARK  
 Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.  
*Mk 16.15-20 1 P 5.5-11*

**26 WED** God has raised Jesus from the dead to give repentance and forgiveness of sins through him.  
*Ac 5.27-33 Jn 3.7-15*

**27 THU** Glad to have had the honour of suffering for the name of Christ, the first disciples continued to teach and proclaim the good news of Christ Jesus, both in the temple and in people's homes.  
*Ac 5.34-42 Jn 3.16-21*

**28 FRI** The believers who had been scattered during the persecution went from place to place proclaiming the good news of the Gospel.  
*Ac 8.1-8 Jn 6.1-15*

**29 SAT** As Paul approached the city of Damascus, a light from heaven shone around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" he asked, and the reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."  
*Ac 9.1-22 Mt 28.1-10*

**30 SUN** A third time, Jesus said to Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter was hurt that he asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" and said, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."  
*Jn 21.1-19 Rv 5.11-14*

# JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 12,49-5

*Johannine hours are meant as a way seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for time of prayer.*

**T**he Bible often makes use of the image of fire to evoke the presence of the holy God. A dynamic and mysterious, even frightening reality, that sheds light, purifies, consumes and protects, fire expresses admirably the different aspects of the quality which defines the being of God and which we call holiness.

On the threshold of the Gospel, the Baptizer had announced that some one would come to "baptize in the Holy Spirit and in fire" (Luke 3,16). In other words, this being would bring the fire of God's holiness to the earth in order to transfigure it. In making this mission his own, Jesus transforms it. He speaks of it as a future event, even though he is already spreading the Good News of the Kingdom by his words and his deeds.

Another Gospel passage sheds light on this "baptism" that Jesus has to undergo rather than to perform. When his disciples want to have the first places in the coming Kingdom, Jesus replies, "Can you...be baptized with the baptism with which I will be baptized?" (Mark 10,38). This is obviously an allusion to the suffering and the violent death which Jesus realizes is to be his fate. By his words about fire, then, Jesus announces in a veiled manner the meaning of his coming: by giving his life to the end, he will enable the fire of God's holiness finally to be kindled on the earth. If Jesus longs for the end of his earthly life, that is not at all from a perverse will to suffer, but because only in this way can he "sanctify" (Matt 6,9) or "glorify" (John 12,27-28) his Father, in other words fully reveal God's holiness. And this prophecy finds its fulfilment on Pentecost day, when "tongues of fire" (Acts 2,3) come down upon the disciples. In this way the transfiguration of the world begins by means of consenting hearts.

- Where can I discover God's love as a fire that gives me warmth and light? How can I let this fire burn in and around me?
- What consequences follow from my own baptism as a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ?

Jesus told his disciples that, when he left them, the Holy Spirit would be their comfort, their port (John 14,16-18,26-27). "God is called the God of consolation," the 'God of mercies,' because constant concern is to comfort, to encourage the fortunate and the afflicted, even if they have committed thousands of sins" (Saint John Chrysostom, fourth century).

"Deep calls to deep" (Psalm 42,7). Experiencing a kind of inner void, some come to the point of asking themselves: but where is God? There can be doubts in us, and God does not love any the less for that. Does not the Risen Christ remain alongside every person, even those who do not know him? Some Christians are utterly disconcerted when they hear that their faith is supposedly the projection of an unconsciously infantile attitude. Doubt can creep into the soul. But doubt is not always redoubtable. The maturity of an inner life enables us to discover a way forward that goes from situation, or doubt, to a humble trusting in God.

When it comes to trusting in God, it is good to remain attached to a few Gospel realities and to go back to them constantly: "In all things place of heart, joy, simplicity, mercy." "Forget in Christ what assails the heart." "God buries our past in the heart of Christ and is going to take care of our future."

**Matthew 5,23-24.** Is hope for a reconciliation among Christians vanishing, like a wave that rolls back? Perhaps, but does not God always open up new ways? Reconciliation is born from within, in the heart of each person, in their own life. The ecumenical vocation of the baptized is above all to be creators of a reconciliation made concrete each day, both near and afar. Lived out within one's own being, reconciliation acquires a credibility and can lead to a reconciliation in that communion of which is the Church. What matters is to live as people who are reconciled. Documents will come later. Does not devoting too much energy to documents, in the end, take us away from putting into practice concretely the Gospel call: to be reconciled without delay?

There are countless Christians who undergo an inner struggle, and sometimes suffering, in their attempt to be bearers of peace in that communion of love which is the Body of Christ, the Church. They are not naive when confronted with abuses that corrode communion. They could criticize the inflexible attitudes of some people. Far from allowing themselves to be drawn in that direction, they strive for silence and love with all their soul. When they express their desires, they are careful not to dig ditches which would separate people still more. They search for all that stimulates us to live as people who are already reconciled. They know that, with a view to the continuities of Christ in the human family, it is so essential for there to appear the reality of a communion, of a reconciled Church, where joy, simplicity and mercy dwell.

does repentance express? It is a surge of trusting by which we place our failings in him, surrendering ourselves to him in silence and in love.

**J**esus was a human being. He knows how humans aspire to inner peace. And before leaving those he loved, he assured them that they would receive a comfort.<sup>12</sup>

Could there be in us a chasm of fears, doubts or loneliness? Joy! Joy of the soul! The depths of worry in us call out to other depths, the inexhaustible compassion of his love.<sup>13</sup>

And what a surprise: trust was at hand, and so often we were unaware of it.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus, the Christ, never abandons us to the anguish of a solitude where all that remains is greyness, morosity and sadness.

Ever since he rose from the dead, his presence has been made tangible through a mystical and visible communion, that communion of love which is the Body of Christ, his Church.

Finding fulfillment in this communion requires a simplicity of heart and of life. Without such simplicity, how can we go forward trusting in Christ?

Is the Church not entering a period today when it is being stripped to the essentials? Its credibility is at stake. This is all the more the case since, in some parts of the world, people are moving away from the faith.

Trust in Christ is not conveyed by means of arguments which want to persuade at all costs and so end up causing anxiety, and even fear.

In the younger generations, some remain at a distance from that communion which is the Church. The question arises: could they too be victims of age-old and brand-new divisions?

Is it not urgent today to be reconciled by love? And when Christ calls, who can refuse? Who can forget his words: be reconciled without delay?<sup>15</sup>

Will we have hearts large enough, imaginations open enough, love burning enough to enter upon that Gospel way: to live as people who are reconciled, without delaying a single day?<sup>16</sup>

When the Church listens, heals, reconciles, it becomes what it is at its most luminous—the limpid reflection of a love and, still more, an abyss of consolation.<sup>17</sup>

Never distant, never on the defensive, freed from all forms of severity, the Church can let the humble trusting of faith shine right into our human hearts.

**A** Gospel light, however feeble it may be, pierces our darkness with its rays.<sup>18</sup> It is fire; it is Spirit. It enables us to live Christ's life both within ourselves and for others.

In this period of history, there is an unprecedented awakening of the Christian conscience with regard to human suffering.

Everywhere in the world, there are Christians who are giving their lives. They are trying to be present amidst the increasingly rapid evolutions of society. In the midst of such changes that come faster and faster, an astonishment arises, astonishment at all that is made possible by love. Wherever they live, these Christians take on responsibilities that are often very specific.<sup>19</sup>

In vast regions of the world, human beings are measured above all in economic terms, and the desire to get rich through the market becomes an overriding obsession.

The consciences of a great many Christians cannot be satisfied by an economic growth that benefits only part of a country's population.

From the time of the apostles, the Virgin Mary and the first believers, there has been a call to live in great simplicity.

One of the pure joys of the Gospel is to go further and further toward a simplicity of heart that leads to a simplicity of life.

Attentive to building up the human family, how can we remain unaware that every people has its own genius?<sup>20</sup> And so many peoples on earth today reflect the mysterious figure of the "suffering servant"<sup>21</sup>: humiliated, ill-treated, with nothing to attract us, they bear our diseases.<sup>22</sup>

**W**hatever point we may be at, the Risen Christ searches tirelessly for us and he always comes to us. Let us hear him knocking at our door when he tells us: come, follow me!<sup>23</sup>

He desires that, with almost nothing, both fire and Spirit be made perceptible in us, above all through the gift of our lives.<sup>24</sup>

However poor we may be, let us not quench the fire, let us not quench the Spirit.<sup>25</sup> In them are kindled the wonder of a love.

And the humble trusting of faith is communicated like fire spreading from one person to the next.

Jesus our joy, when we understand that you love us, something in our life is soothed and even transformed. We ask you: what are you expecting of me? And we know that you always reply: let nothing trouble you, I am praying in you, dare to give your life.

Christ of all compassion, we are thirsting to hear you tell us: "Arise, may your soul live!" We never wish to choose darkness or discouragement, but to welcome the brightness of your presence; it sustains us, it inspires us.

**17** Because of the separations between Christians, some find themselves in a situation where they cannot receive the Eucharist. Rather than becoming upset over this difficulty, it is possible to offer "blessed bread" to every person present at the celebration of the Eucharist, to all without exception, both believers and non-believers. This sign of hospitality is rooted in the story of the multiplication of the loaves: one day Christ blessed five loaves of bread and distributed them to all without distinction (Matthew 14,13-21). This leads us to reflect on the Church's motherly love; because of it she has managed to discover the unexpected. Does not this gesture, brought into being long ago among Eastern Christians, offer a concrete response in certain contemporary situations?

**18** "God is light; in him there is no darkness." (I John 1,5)

**19** Among Christians, there are many who refuse to accept any form of exclusion, unemployment, underprivileged areas of large cities... There are young people, as well as not-so-young and even elderly persons, who devote part of their time to volunteer service for others, for example by going to be with children or old people in their neighbourhood. Some support this volunteer work by collecting funds, and this is fine. But it is desirable that young people accomplish such service without an appeal for funds: three or four persons can help others by sharing their meagre resources.

**20** We are in a period when a crisis of confidence in man is widespread. Particularly noticeable in Europe, it sets before us this challenge: what responsibilities can we take on so that a new confidence can be born, utterly indispensable for the building up of Europe?

**21** See Isaiah 53,2-4.7.

**22** Happy those who, in recent years, have done all they could to bring about the freedom of their peoples! Who will uphold these freedoms in places where they are still quite young?

**23** See Revelation 3,20 and Mark 10,21. Going to the very extreme of the gift of ourselves by yes for an entire lifetime can be a support for those who take to heart the continuities of Christ. This yes is an anchor for inner freedom and the reminder of a clear meaning of life in the Gospel: to give for others. They are well present throughout the world, those who, by the gift of themselves, reflect something of the holiness of Christ without even realizing it.

**24** John the Baptist announced that Christ would baptize "in the Holy Spirit and in fire" (Matthew 3,11).

**25** I Thessalonians 5,19.